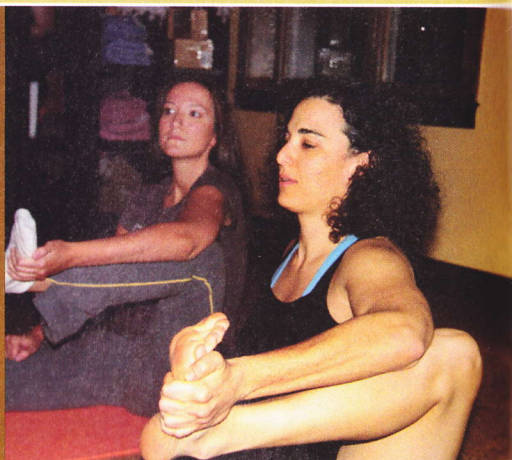


Posed for Greatness East Comes North

Raubi Perilli, UC Explorer



For many years, yoga lovers from all corners of the Urban Corridor (UC) have made a regular trek to the west side of downtown's Lotus Room and Yogani (perhaps Tampa's best known yoga studios) to practice their discipline in a class setting. The two locations are extremely popular, drawing upwards to 30 or more students for some sessions.

For those who live on the north side of downtown or prefer slightly smaller class sizes, there's now a new option – Jai Dee Yoga & Wellness Studio. It's located in a restored Seminole Heights bungalow, just north of the intersection of Florida and Hillsborough Avenues.

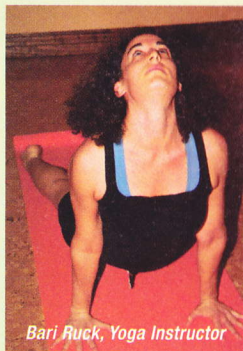
Inside the quaint studio, furniture is minimal, lights are low and shoes are banned. It's a serene atmosphere that Jai Dee's owner, Gwen Hanner, says is "designed to allow for thoughtful mediation and relaxation."

Gwen is a licensed mental health counselor and hypnotherapist who has been practicing in Seminole Heights (the neighborhood where she lives) since 1995. She's also training at Tampa's Prana Vinyasa to become a teacher of yoga, which she has practiced since her childhood (when she used to mimic poses she saw in her mom's yoga pocketbook).

Gwen's dedication to the eastern healing art grew stronger and more intimate during her

college years. That's when she began using yoga – which is recognized as a rehabilitation tool for obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and other ailments – as a drug-free alternative to help her overcome crippling anxiety attacks that surfaced after the sudden passing of her father. With focused, regular sessions, her symptoms quickly subsided and within two years were no more.

It's Gwen's first-hand experience that continues to encourage her to embrace not only yoga's mental philosophies, but its physical philosophies as well.



Bari Ruck, Yoga Instructor

"While yoga helped me through an anxious, difficult point in my life, it's also been a great, low-impact way for me to stay physically fit," says Gwen.

The physical aspect of Yoga is achieved by positioning the body in asanas (i.e., postures), which are designed to strengthen, tone and align the body. Each posture promotes healthy blood flow by directing and pushing it to the tissues of organs and glands.

"I particularly like Halasana or the Plough pose," says Gwen. "It's a very calming pose and the thing I love most about it is how I can feel it warm up my kidneys with oxygen-rich blood."

The mental portion of Yoga relies heavily on breathing techniques and meditation. It subsides

thoughts, encourages clarity of mind and evokes body awareness.

There are many types of yoga: Iyengar, Jivamukti, Bikram, Kundalini, Ashtanga and more. But while each comes with its own set of poses and benefits, they all end one way.

"Savasana, or corpse pose, is the finishing touch of the yoga practice," explains Gwen. "It's an important relaxing posture designed for rejuvenation."

"Many people, including myself, have had Savasana bring about a deeply joyful or blissful meditative experience where the mind becomes empty and expands to a non-dualistic state of consciousness," she continues. "There are no thoughts; only an experience full of mind-body joy."



Gwen Hanner, Jai Dee Owner

This is a state of mind some students take years to achieve. To be able to "let go" of your thoughts takes practice, but as Lao Tzo, the father of Taoism, stated, "the journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step."

Gwen believes that first step to clarity for many locals will be Jai Dee, as it's the first yoga studio to open in its area. She's also brought in the expertise of more than 10 experienced yoga instructors to help make it happen.

For first-timers, Bari Ruck's "Introduction to Basic Yoga" class is likely the wisest choice. Bari takes her time to provide a simple (yet detailed) step-by-step overview of basic poses and postures, as well as the history of yoga's multi-layered world. The 10-year vet does it with a calm demeanor that makes learning easy, comfortable and – most importantly – fun. **✎**

MORE THAN JUST YOGA

From Buddhist Chanting to Tai Chi, Jai-Dee Yoga & Wellness Studio offers much more than yoga. To find out more about upcoming classes and workshops, or to read bios about Jai-Dee's instructors, visit www.JaiDeeYoga.com.

Where It's At.

SH Jai Dee Yoga & Wellness Studio
5803 N. Florida Ave.
(813) 231-2311
www.jaideeyoga.com

Where Are Others?

DT Lotus Room Yoga Studio
1101 W. Kennedy Blvd.
(813) 254-6777
www.yogalotusroom.com

HP Yogani
1112 W. Platt St.
(813) 251-9668
www.yogani.com

Try Something New!

SH Living Harmony Healing Center
4203 N. Central Ave.
(813) 892-6909
www.myspace.com/livingharmony

SH Urban Fitness
4705 N. Florida Ave.
(813) 232-5952.
www.urbanfitnesstampa.com

The UC Explorers

Raubi Perilli graduated from the University of Tampa's Writing Department and has lived in the UC's downtown, Davis Islands and Hyde Park areas. She recently joined the New Heights staff as an "Explorer" and will be touring the places in the UC that you've always wanted to try, but have yet to do so.



Watch for Raubi's first-hand stories in upcoming issues of New Heights; and if you'd like her to visit an unusual or little known type of business or event, please email your suggestions to editor@NewHeightsMag.com.